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Degas the joker, poet, recluse – and master draughtsman. Review of Christopher Lloyd, Edgar Degas: Drawings and Pastels, Thames & Hudson, London 2014

Citation for published version:

Fowle, F 2015, 'Degas the joker, poet, recluse – and master draughtsman. Review of Christopher Lloyd, Edgar Degas: Drawings and Pastels, Thames & Hudson, London 2014', *The Art Newspaper*, vol. Vol. XXIV, no. No.265, pp. 59.

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

The Art Newspaper

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Christopher Lloyd, *Edgar Degas Drawings and Pastels*
Thames & Hudson, London 2014
320pp 237 illustrations (220 colour, 17 b.w)
ISBN 978-0-500-09381-8

Degas was above all a draughtsman and, as this gem of a book reveals, it is possible to trace his long and complex artistic career through an examination of the drawings and pastels alone. In this lavishly illustrated, meticulously researched, yet refreshingly accessible publication, Lloyd eloquently and skillfully weaves a path through Degas's career, focusing on the major stages in his development. Key works are discussed in the context of French academic practices, the history of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, and the artist's personal life.

Lloyd argues that Degas's skill as an academic draughtsman remained a point of reference throughout his career. Preparatory drawings certainly played an important role in the early years, when his primary aim was to produce history paintings, as well as portraits of close friends and family. Even when he made the dramatic shift towards modern life subjects in the late 1860s, his traditional training is evident in the drawings that have survived, both in his Notebooks and in the commercially prepared coloured sheets that the artist then favoured.

Degas drew extensively on the Old Masters and his output includes over 600 known copies, which (like Cézanne) he continued to produce well beyond his student years. He was never a slavish imitator and, throughout his career, used his sources creatively, as a stimulus to his artistic imagination. Lloyd draws an apt comparison with Watteau who, like Degas, kept a reservoir of drawings, which he referred to and reused in later compositions.

Degas is well known for his constant revisions and changes of direction, especially in the later stages of his career. Lloyd identifies the pursuit of perfection as the driving force behind his art, combined with a continual search for originality. Degas was invariably experimenting with different media and supports. The introduction of essence in the 1860s liberated him, enabling him to be more spontaneous and instinctive in his approach. In the 1870s he developed the monotype process and used it as a starting point for his pastels and gouaches. In the 1880s and 1890s he began working with tracing paper, adding strips as he went along and allowing his compositions to develop organically. By the 1890s pastel was the preferred medium, blurring the distinction between painting and drawing. His late Nudes are heavily worked in bright, iridescent, even acidic colours, the medium applied with vigorous strokes.

Lloyd pays assiduous attention to technical detail, clearly explaining innovative processes such as monotype, or discussing in depth Degas's experimentation with different fixatives for pastel. The book contains some wonderful passages of close, visual analysis: the way in which Degas altered the angle of the pencil to achieve a specific effect; or manipulated the medium with his own fingers,

blurring and smudging the drawing in a manner that anticipates modernist art practice.

By necessity, since the text itself is relatively short, some details of Degas's career are quickly summarised, but Lloyd takes time to focus on particular works (such as the 1879 *Portrait of Duranty* in the Burrell Collection, or *Waiting*, c.1882 in the Getty Museum) and key moments: the first modern life subjects in the late 1860s; the pastels nudes exhibited at the last Impressionist exhibition in 1886 (and at Boussod & Valadon in 1888); Durand-Ruel's 1892 exhibition of landscape monotypes. The book also includes a comprehensive selection of illustrations – copies of Old Masters; sketches of family members; drawings of jockeys and ballerinas; monotypes of landscapes and brothels; pastels of milliners and nudes – from both private and public collections.

The book is peppered with fascinating insights into Degas's character: Degas the joker, turning up his collar because there was too much fresh air in Monet's pictures; Degas the poet, who wrote around 20 sonnets; and Degas the misanthropic recluse in later life. This is a scholarly publication and the narrative is enlivened with quotations taken from a variety of sources - from critics such as Edmond Duranty and J.-K. Huysmans to Jeanniot's 1933 memoir and Degas's own Notebooks and letters. Frustratingly, the publishers have taken the decision to exclude footnotes, despite which, this remains a useful and thoroughly enjoyable addition to Degas scholarship.

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